

Report

Pinnacles National Monument

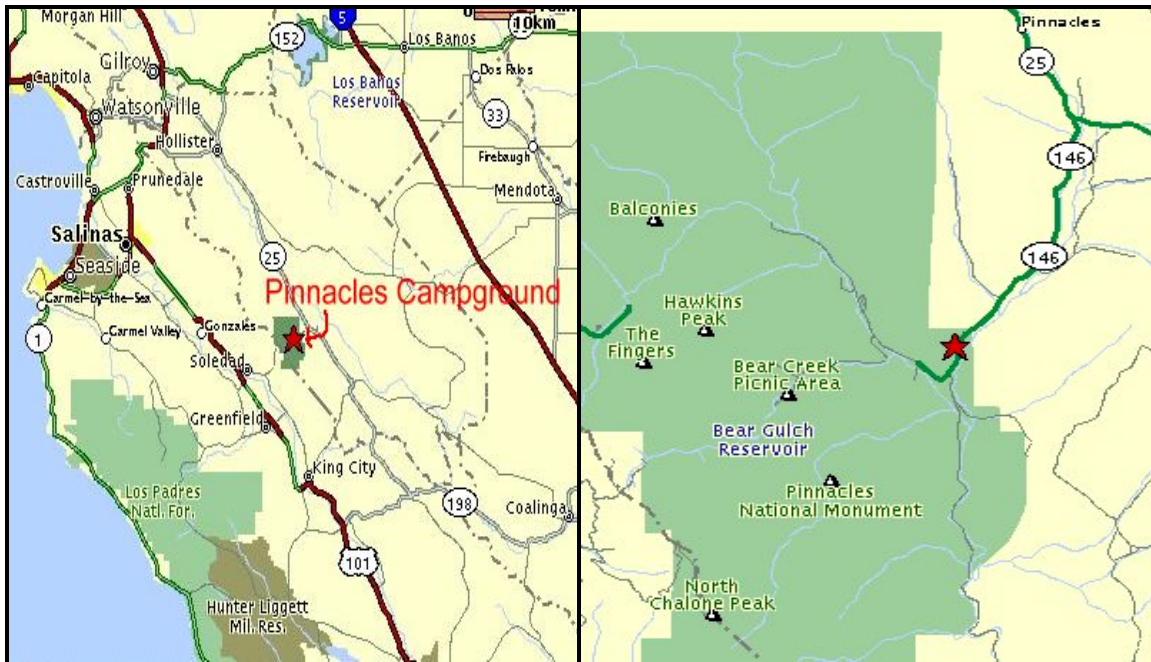
■ 1.0 Site Description

The Pinnacles National Monument, located in central California, contains 16,265 acres, of which 12,952 acres are designated as wilderness (see Figure 1). It was named a national monument by Theodore Roosevelt in 1908, and its boundary was recently expanded under an order that President Clinton signed on January 11, 2000. Currently, the Monument consists of two districts – east and west. The West District is accessible from Highway 101 near the town of Soledad, and east of Highway 146 to the Chaparral area. The East District entrance can be accessed via Highway 25, south of the city of Hollister and west of Highway 146 (see Figure 2). The districts are not connected by any roads, and it is not possible to drive through the Monument from one district to the other. The entrance road to the West District is a narrow, winding, single-lane road, and is not recommended for large recreational vehicles (RVs).

Figure 1. View of Pinnacles National Monument



The primary visitor facilities at the Monument are the Bear Gulch Visitor Center in the East District and the Chaparral Ranger Station in the West District. A temporary bridge has been constructed across Chalone Creek. There is no bus access to the Bear Gulch Visitor Center area, and the bridge is also restricted for RVs and trailers. The Bear Gulch Visitor Center has 150 parking spaces, and a parking lot at the Chalone Creek picnic area has another 150 spaces. When the Visitor Center lot fills up (usually on the weekends during peak season), rangers close the bridge access and divert visitors to the Chalone Creek lot. The West District has 40 to 50 spaces in a paved parking lot, with another 60 spaces in an unpaved overflow lot nearby.

Figure 2. Map of Pinnacles National Monument

The primary focus of the Monument is that of natural preserve and recreation. The main visitor uses of the Monument are hiking, technical rock climbing, and as a place to study and observe the natural ecology of central California. The monument is open to day use activities all year long from 7:30 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. daily. There is a \$5.00 entrance fee per vehicle and \$2.00 entrance fee per person (for walk-ins), valid for seven days. Since flood damage occurred in February 1998, many park facilities, including some trails and park areas have not been repaired. Parking areas are often being filled to capacity well before noon on busier spring and some fall weekends.

In 1998, approximately 94,639 visitors visited the Monument. Park visitation is highest in March, April and May and lowest in December and January. There is a spring and a fall peak. Because of its more developed facilities and attractions, the East District typically receives two-thirds of the total visitation. Visitors are typically from the San Francisco Bay Area and the Monterey area, and the average stay is four hours.

There are no camping or lodging facilities available inside the monument. A large privately operated campground, Pinnacles Campground, Inc., is located adjacent to the east entrance from State Highway 25 on Route 146. It has approximately 140 campsites (four to six persons per site). The east entrance is served by motels in Hollister (33 miles north) and King City (35 miles south). The west entrance is served by motels in Soledad (12 miles west).

Some important transportation issues include the lack of adequate parking during peak seasons and a plan to eliminate the Chalona Creek parking lot and convert it to an administrative area. During peak season weekends, parking at the Bear Gulch Visitor Center often overflow into Chalona Creek. Any changes to the Chalona Creek lot would adversely affect the parking situation at the Monument. Furthermore, the expansion of

the Monument boundary (nearly doubling its original size) would also likely bring more traffic and visitors into the area in the future.

■ 2.0 Existing ATS

Currently, there is a two-van shuttle system that operates from the Pinnacles Ranch campground to the Bear Gulch Visitor Center. It uses 15-passenger vans and makes a stop at the Chalone Creek parking lot. The NPS staff currently operates and maintains the vehicles. The average roundtrip time is approximately 20 minutes, and the average wait for a visitor is estimated to be about 12 minutes. The shuttle only operates on the weekends during the peak season (February to June and September to November). During the peak seasons, the shuttles are well utilized. There is a makeshift shuttle staging area at the campground with approximately 60 graveled parking spaces. The superintendent has expressed that parking is sometimes inadequate.

■ 3.0 ATS Needs

There do not appear to be any short-term Alternative Transportation Systems (ATS) needs. However, because of the boundary expansion and the possibility that the Chalone Creek parking area might be eliminated in the future, there may be long-term ATS needs. The park staff has expressed the possibility of having a concessioner operate the service with some form of subsidy from public funds. The concessioner could potentially be the operator of the Pinnacles Campground that would provide a “packaged” lodging and transportation service to visitors. However, expansion of the current service or any plans to hand-over the shuttle operation will depend on future demand and profitability of the system. The future boundary expansion may also affect the outcome, as there is a possibility that the expanded park boundary may include the current campground.

■ 4.0 Basis for ATS Needs

Future expansion of the current shuttle system may be warranted if parking continues to be an issue at the Monument. If the Chalone Creek parking lot is converted into an administrative area, there is a need to relocate the parking to other areas. Furthermore, the potential reduction in parking spaces may increase demand for a shuttle system and provide more incentives for visitors to leave their vehicles in a staging area off of the park boundary.

■ 5.0 Bibliography

Kevin Galvin. *National Monuments To Be Declared*. Associated Press. Updated 8:18 a.m. ET, January 11, 2000.

Pinnacles National Monument Web site (<http://www.nps.gov/pinn/>).

■ 6.0 Persons Interviewed

Steve Shackleton, Superintendent, Pinnacles National Monument

Ken Hutchinson, Chief of Facility and Maintenance, Pinnacles National Monument

John Portillo, Chief Ranger, Pinnacles National Monument

Larry Whalon, Science and Resource Specialist, Pinnacles National Monument